

By Sidney Smith

THE MYSTERY GIRL

A Fascinating Romance of Baffling Plot and Thrilling Love Interest

By CAROLYN WELLS

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THIS BEGINS THE STORY John Waring, newly elected to the presidency of Corinth College, a venerable New England seat of learning, is found stabbed to death in his study. He was about to marry Emily Datta, a cultured widow. He had no known enemies, and there was no way in which a murderer could have left the locked room. The young man came Anita Austin, a girl called the "Mystery Girl" by the natives on account of her reticence. Meeting her at a tea party, Waring had let a cup crash to the floor. The next morning Nogi, the Japanese butler, is missing. Gordon Lockwood, Dr. Waring's secretary, is examined by Detective Morton, who suspects the doctor's suspicion. The doctor's stickpin and a large sum of money have disappeared. Mrs. Payne, the doctor's housekeeper, and Helen, her niece, with whom Pinky Payne, Mrs. Bates' nephew, is smitten, are examined. The will, in favor of Mrs. Bates, has disappeared. Mrs. Waring, a distant relative whom Waring disliked, is the next heir. Miss Austin hears about the murder.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

Mystery Girl Is Quizzed "I heard him lecture, you know. Tell me, is that—the news?" "Yes, dead." Mrs. Adams spoke bluntly on purpose. She had felt in vague way that this strange person, Miss Mystery, had a certain air about her. Waring that she admitted, and the landlady was determined to find out. To her own satisfaction she did find out, for the girl had a certain unconsciousness; indeed, it was not so much a faint as such a desperate effort to regain her poise that it unnerved her. "Now, Miss Austin, why do you take it so hard? He was a stranger to you, wasn't he?" "Yes—yes, of course, he was."

"Why are you so disturbed then?" "He was such a—such a fine man," the girl's stifled sobs impeded her speech. "Well, somebody killed him." At that, Miss Austin seemed turned down. "Killed him?" she whispered, in a voice of terror. "Yes—or else he killed himself—they don't feel sure." Mrs. Adams, once mentioned in the narrative, told all she knew of the circumstances, and in the exciting recital almost forgot to watch the effect of the tale on her listener. But this effect was entirely unexpected. At the partly open door, Old Salt Adams stood, eavesdropping, but with a kindly, anxious look on his face that boded no ill to any one. And he noticed that the girl's attention was on the woman who had just spoken. Her face drawn and scared, and soon she exclaimed, with a burst of nervous fury, "Stop! please stop! Leave the room, and don't come back until I am alone!"

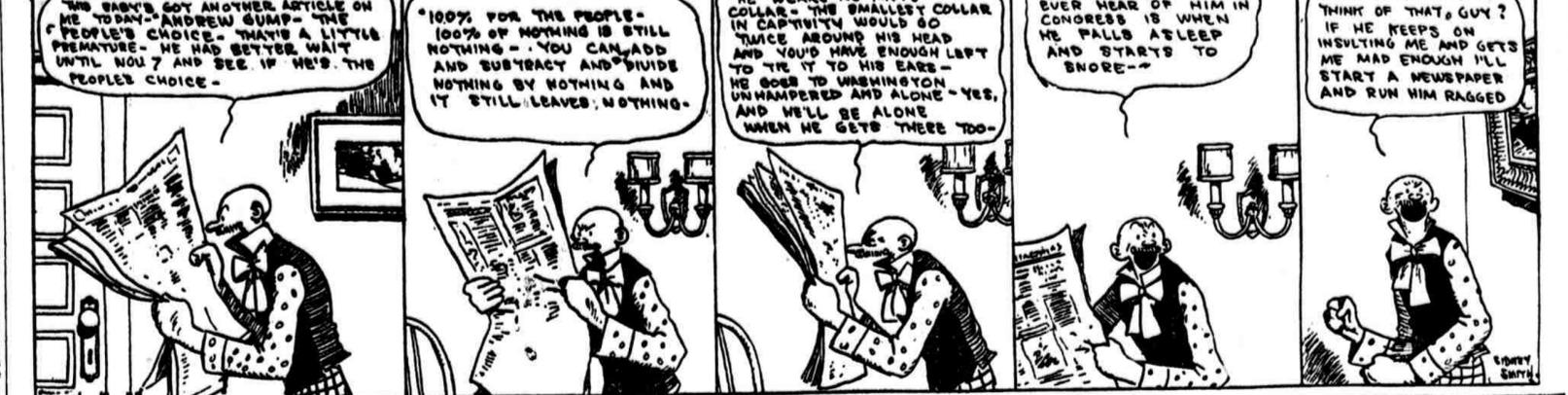
"Go down stairs, Esther," he said, gravely. "I want to speak to Miss Austin myself." "I want to speak to Miss Austin myself," then at the other, and utterly routed by this unbelievable turn of affairs, Mrs. Adams went. Old Salt closed the room door, and came to the trembling girl. "Miss Austin," he said kindly, "I want to help you—but I must ask you to explain yourself a little. The people in my house call you 'Mystery Girl.' Why are you here? Are you in Corinth at all?" For a moment the girl seemed about to respond to his kindly, gentle attitude and address. Then, something stayed her, and she let her lovely face harden in a stony blankness, as she replied, "It is a bit intrusive, but I've no reason not to tell. I am an art student, and I came here to paint New England winter scenery."

"Have you done much?" "I haven't been here quite a week yet—and I've been picking out available spots—and for two days I've had a cold." "How did you get cold?" The voice was kind, but it had a definite note, as if desirous of an accurate answer. Miss Mystery looked at him. "How does any one get cold?" she said, trying to smile; "perhaps sitting in a draft—perhaps by means of a cold. It is almost well now."

"Perhaps by walking in the snow and getting one's feet wet." Mr. Adams suggested, and the girl turned frightened eyes on him. "Don't," she breathed; "Mr. Adams, don't!" Her voice was piteous; her eyes implored him to stop torturing her. "Why, what's the matter in my saying that?" he went on, inexorably. "You wouldn't go anywhere that you wouldn't want known, would you, Miss Mystery?" He spoke the last two words in a menacing way, and the great dark eyes stared him with the look of a stag at a trap.

Then again by a desperate effort the girl recovered herself and said coldly: "Please speak plainly, Mr. Adams, there's a special meaning in your words." "There is, Miss Austin. Perhaps I have no right to ask you why, but I want to ask you if you went over to Dr. Waring's house late in the evening night before last?" "Sunday night, do you mean?" "Miss Mystery controlled her voice, at her hands were clenched and her feet tapped the floor in her stifled excitement. "Yes, Sunday night." "No, of course, I did not go over there at night. I was there in the afternoon with Mrs. Bates and Mr. Payne." "I know that. And you then met Waring for the first time?" "Yes, for the first time." She spoke with the utmost care. "The first time in your life?" "The first time in my life." But if a statement carried its own denial, that one seemed to be the long dark lashes fell on the white cheeks. The girl quivered, and if Anita Austin had been uttering deepest perjury she could have shown no more convincing evidence of falsehood. Yet Old Salt looked at her benevolently. She was so young, so small, so alone—and so mysterious. "I can't make you out," he shook his head. "But in the eyes of Miss Austin, that is," he hedged, "unless I find out something definite against you. I feel ought to tell you that you've enemies," as the girl looked up surprised, "you've made enemies in this house. I wonder—the way you've acted! Now, why can't you be chummy and reliable like?" "Chummy? Sociable? With whom?" "With all the boarders. There's young Lockwood now—and there's young Tyler—I know. I will—Mr. Adams—I will try to be more sociable, now—as to Dr. Waring—why did he kill himself?" Old Salt eyed her narrowly. "We don't know that he did," he began. "But," Mrs. Adams told me all the details," she sulked—and if that

THE GUMPS—Bring on the Lions, Let Them Roar



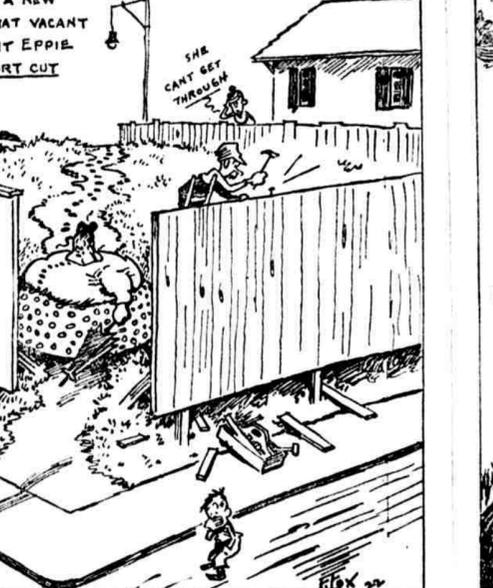
SOMEBODY'S STENOG—The Sacrifice of "Venus"



The Young Lady Across the Way



Aunt Eppie Hogg, the Fatteat Woman in Three Counties



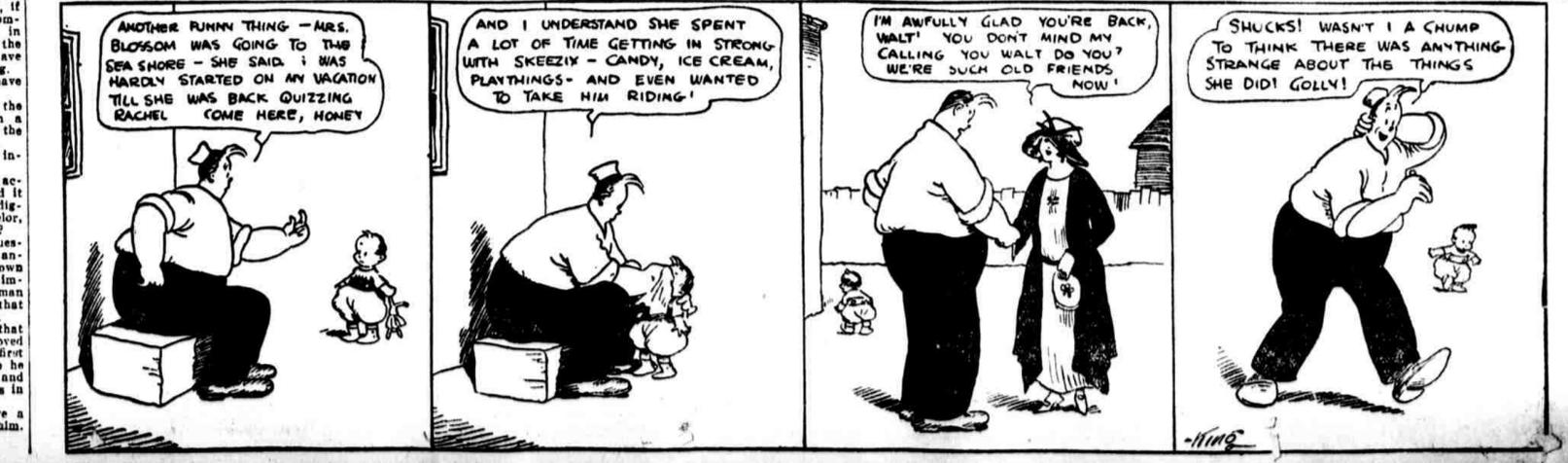
SCHOOL DAYS



PETEY—She Should Worry



GASOLINE ALLEY—Oh! That Being the Case—



CONTINUED TOMORROW